

Wisconsin National Guard Incident and Update Information System:**History:**

During FY 2003/2004 when a deployed unit had a serious injury or casualty the media would immediately run a story, for example. "A soldier with the Wisconsin National Guard's 12th MP Company was injured in Iraq". The media could not print the name nor give further details; this would cause families of the affected unit to panic and flood Rear Detachments and Family Assistance Centers (FAC) with calls inquiring if it was their service member. To ease this situation, in 2004 the Wisconsin National Guard Family Phone Tree Incident Reporting System was developed. When an incident occurred in a unit, a message would be disseminated using the Family Readiness Group (FRG) phone trees created at each unit. The FRG phone tree callers would deliver an approved script, to tell Families there was an injury or death, but their service member was not involved. This system eased calls to our Family Readiness Resources.

The media is now required to wait before publishing names of those involved, giving us time to react and provide information. The affected family is notified well before the media publishes any information.

Historically, if there was an incident overseas involving a Wisconsin National Guard service member a 'Blackout' would occur until the family was notified and the volunteers from the FRG had reached 90% of the Families using the phone tree. At this time the 'communication blackout' was removed. A 'Blackout' is when communication is shut down overseas and the service members cannot make outgoing calls. Currently, due to the number of service members deployed at one time and the vast area to which they are deployed, the enforcement of a 'Blackout' is no longer possible.

With these facts in mind the Wisconsin National Guard leadership implemented a new "Incident and Update Information System," as outlined below. The update line replaces the previous practice of using the FRG phone tree for notifying Families of an incident or providing updated information about our mobilized service members.

Purpose:

To provide the Families of the Wisconsin National Guard (WING) an opportunity to receive more timely information pertaining to incidents or updates while a unit is away from home station. This line may be used for a variety of messages including, but not limited to: notification regarding service members' estimated flight information for homecoming, arrival information when service members arrive at their deployment destination, notification that a service member has been seriously wounded in action (no names or details are provided), notification that a service member has been killed in action.

Process:

1. The Wisconsin National Guard Leadership and the unit commander determine that a message needs dissemination to the Families.
2. When information is posted to the Incident and Update Information System. The Major Subordinate Command (MSC) Commander or Rear Detachment Commander is notified that a message has been put on the Incident Update Line and relays this information to the Family Readiness Group Volunteers. The Family Readiness Groups may use email to inform families that new information is available on the Incident Line. A message will be broadcast on the Wisconsin National Guard's Family Interactive Site which can be reached through www.wingfam.org, then click on the Family Interactive Link. The broadcast will tell the Families where and if additional information can be found on the interactive site.

If you do not have a username and password for this site please ask your soldier/airman to grant you access. If you have forgotten your password or username, contact a Family Assistance Center Liaison at (800) 292-9464 and they will assist you.

3. In order to retrieve a message from the Incident Update Line, call (800) 292-9464 and choose option #6 "Deployment Updates" and listen to the message. Families will hear a recorded message like the sample message below:

You've reached the update line for the Wisconsin Army National Guard. It is ____ (time) on _____ (day), _____ (date). A soldier/airman from _____ (unit) was wounded in action (or injured) in _____ (country) _____ (day and/or time). The immediate family of the soldier/airman who was injured has already been notified. We cannot tell you the soldier's/airman's name or provide any details at this time because federal law prohibits us from releasing any personal or medical information without the service members' consent. . Do not contact your Family Readiness Group Volunteer. Your volunteer will have no further information on this incident. Please understand that this is all the information we can provide on this incident. If you do have any questions of concerns please contact your Rear Detachment or a Family Assistance Center (FAC)."

4. The Incident Line message will be updated if at all possible with further information as it is released.

Additional Information:

1. The incident line is limited to receiving 48 calls received at the exact same time. There is a possibility you could call and receive a busy signal. If you do get a busy signal, please hang up and call again.
2. For the privacy of those involved please refrain from speculating about the information provided on the Incident Update Line. The Incident Update Line phone number should not be shared with the general public or beyond the service member's primary and secondary point of contact.

3. Military Leadership will determine length of time the information will be posted but the message will remain on the Incident Update Line for approximately 7 days unless an update is posted to replace it.
4. If there is no Incident Update Line message when a person calls they will hear, "There is no update at this time."
5. If you wish to receive email updates please make sure to contact your FRG Volunteer to ensure that he/she has your email address. If you do not know your FRG Volunteer, please contact a FAC or the Family Program Office at (800) 292-9464 to obtain that information.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. *How often can I call the Incident Update line?* Please call as often as you would like.
2. *Is the information on the Family Interactive Site located at Wingfam.org the same as the information on the Incident Update line?* Yes, they contain the same information.
3. *Can I share the telephone number with anyone else?* We ask that the primary and secondary points of contact for the service member keep the 800 number to themselves and not share it with the general public.
4. *Why didn't my FRG Volunteer initiate the phone tree?* The DAG, MSC Commander or Rear Detachment Commander determines when the telephone tree is initiated. Your FRG Volunteer does not initiate the phone tree on his/her own without direction from military leadership.
5. *Does my unit FRG still have a phone tree?* Yes. You will still receive phone tree calls and should still return any messages to your phone tree caller promptly.
6. *What is the extension I should press when I call (800) 292-9464?* Please choose option #6 to listen to the message. You can make this selection immediately and do not need to wait to hear all the options.
7. *How do I know that it isn't my service member involved in the incident?* A message will not be placed on Wingfam.org or on the Incident Update line until the family has been notified of the incident.
8. *How will I know that there is a message on the Incident Update line?* When at all possible your Family Readiness Group Volunteer will send an email to notify you of a message. However, if you see something on the news or hear a rumor about an incident, feel free to call the incident line to put your mind at ease. You can also check the Family Interactive Website on Wingfam.org periodically to see if there is a broadcast message.
9. *Who should I call if I have more questions?* Please call the Family Assistance Center if you have further questions. Please note that the Family Assistance Center cannot release the name of a service member that is killed in action for at least 24 hours according to Federal Law. Also, they are not allowed to release information on the medical condition of an injured service member without his/her consent.
10. *Will I ever receive a phone call about an injury or death of a service member in our unit?* If the DAG feels it is appropriate, there is a possibility that the FRG telephone tree could be activated to pass on a message. However, you will never receive a call from the Family Readiness Group phone tree with negative information about your service member.
11. *At the Mobilization Brief, they talked about communication "Blackouts" when there is a casualty overseas. Is there still a Blackout?* Due to the fact that there are so many Wisconsin National Guard service members overseas and they are so spread out there is no guarantee that a Blackout procedure could be enforced.